



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Most Reverend John E. Keehner

DIOCESE OF SIOUX CITY

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Dear Parents,

As Bishop, I am charged with the task of tending the flock entrusted to me, as Jesus entrusts his lambs to Simon Peter in Chapter 22 of the Gospel according to John. One important way in which I am called to tend the flock is by working with you, as parents, in the education of your children in the Catholic faith and doing so in an environment which is safe.

I know that you hold the health and well-being of your children to be of utmost importance. Your children should be safe everywhere, whether at home, at school, or at church. One way we can ensure their safety is by teaching them from a very young age about appropriate and inappropriate touch.

With this in mind, and in response to guidance from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Safe Environment Office of the Diocese of Sioux City has prepared the enclosed brochure entitled, *Teach Your Child About Safe Touch*.

I urge you to read this brochure and to begin an ongoing discussion with your children about what you have learned and what they need to know about "safe touch" and how they can protect themselves if someone is acting inappropriately with them. Together, as families and as a Church we must be vigilant in our efforts to protect the innocence of our children, safeguarding them from the scourge of child sexual abuse.

And let us pray that through the intercession of our Blessed Mother, Mary, all children will be safe and truly cherished as the future of your family and the future of our Church.

May God bless you and your families.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend John E. Keehner
Bishop of Sioux City

Teach your child to follow safety rules:

- It is not okay to touch someone else's private body parts.
- It is not okay for someone to touch his or her own private body parts in front of you.
- It is not okay for someone to ask you to touch his or her private body parts.
- It is not okay for someone to ask you to take your clothes off except if they are a doctor helping to see if you are hurt or sick
- It is not okay for someone to take photos or videos of you with your clothes off.
- It is not okay for someone to show you photos or videos of people without their clothes on.
- You can decide who can touch you, who can kiss you, or who can give you a hug. You have the right to say, "no."

When someone touches you the wrong way:

- Say no! Tell the person that you don't like it and you don't want to be touched.
- Get away fast! Run away from the person whose touch you don't like.
- Never stay alone with that person ever again.
- Call for help. You can scream.
- Believe in yourself. You did nothing wrong.
- If someone touches you in the wrong way, tell someone you trust what has happened. Don't let threats scare you into running away or keeping quiet. When a person touches you and asks you to keep it a secret between the two of you, ask yourself, "Does the secret bother me?"
- Don't keep secrets that make you feel uncomfortable. Go to a person you trust—a parent, a relative, a teacher, or your doctor. If the person you go to doesn't believe you, go to someone else you trust until someone believes you and helps you.
- Do everything you can to stay away from the person who is touching you in the wrong way or making you feel uncomfortable. Don't stay alone with a person who touches you in a way that makes you uncomfortable or makes you feel unsafe.

Good Touch

It feels good to be hugged and kissed by the people you love. For example:

- When Mommy gives you a hug and kiss after you wake up.
- When Daddy gives you a good-night hug and kiss.
- When Grandma and Grandpa come to visit and everyone gets hugs and kisses.

Bad Touch

Touches that make you feel uncomfortable are usually bad touches. You don't have to keep a secret when someone gives you bad touch. Don't feel that you are bad. Whoever gives you

a bad touch is the one who is bad, not you. Your body belongs to you. Nobody should touch you if you don't want to be touched. Do you know what a bad touch is?

- It is a bad touch if it hurts you.
- It is a bad touch if someone touches you on your body where you don't want to be touched.
- It is a bad touch if the person touches you under your clothing or tickles you under the clothing.
- It is a bad touch if a person touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- It is a bad touch if that touch makes you feel scared and nervous.
- It is a bad touch if a person forces you to touch him or her.
- It is a bad touch if a person asks you not to tell anyone.
- It is a bad touch if a person threatens to hurt you if you tell.

Message to parents and concerned adults such as relatives, neighbors and friends of the family:

Unfortunately, some adults may abuse the trust you give them. The person who touches your child in a way you don't like is the person who is doing something wrong, not your child. Sexual abuse is always the fault of the bigger, older, or stronger person.

The Diocese of Sioux City is committed to protecting all of our children from sexual abuse. We believe that parents are the first and best educators of their children when it comes to teaching them about how to avoid the potential for sexual abuse. We are providing you with the following information in the hopes it will aid you in having conversations with your children about what is safe touching and how to protect themselves from possible sexual abuse. If you have additional questions regarding this subject you can contact Dan Ellis, PhD, Diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator, 712-233-7517.

If you need to report possible sexual abuse you can contact the Iowa Child Abuse Hotline at 800-362-2178, or by calling 911.



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Teach Your Child About Safe Touch

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse is an especially complicated form of abuse because of the layers of damage, guilt and shame the child feels. It's important to recognize that sexual abuse doesn't always involve bodily contact. Making sexual comments to a child or exposing a child to sexual situations or materials is sexually abusive, whether or not touching is involved.

- Sexual Grooming is the process by which an offender often gradually draws the child into a sexual relationship and maintains that relationship in secrecy. The sex offender works to separate the child from family and peers, typically by giving special attention to the child and making the child feel that they have a special relationship. The sex offender sizes up the child's vulnerability—emotional neediness, isolation and lower self-confidence. Children with less parental oversight are more desirable sexual prey.
- While news stories of sexual predators are scary, what is even more frightening is that sexual abuse usually occurs at the hands of someone the child knows and should be able to trust—most often close relatives, friends of parents, neighbors and trusted activity leaders. And contrary to what many believe, it's not just girls who are at risk. Boys and girls both suffer from sexual abuse. In fact, sexual abuse of boys may be underreported due to shame and stigma.
- Aside from the physical damage that sexual abuse can cause, the emotional component is powerful and far-reaching. Sexually abused children are tormented by shame and guilt and a belief that they are "damaged goods" for life. They may feel that they are responsible for the abuse or somehow brought it upon themselves. This can lead to self-loathing and sexual problems as they grow older—often either excessive promiscuity or an inability to have intimate relations and even frightening flashbacks when that remind them of their abuse.
- The shame of sexual abuse makes it very difficult for children to come forward. They may worry that others won't believe them, will be angry with them, will believe it was the child's fault or that it will split their family apart. Because of these difficulties, false accusations of sexual abuse are not common, so if a child confides in you, take him or her seriously. Don't turn a blind eye!

Here are some suggestions for teaching your children about Safe Touching

Step One

Teach children the correct names of all their different body parts, including their private body parts. Children often find it hard to tell about sexual abuse because they don't know the words to use. Learning correct (anatomical) words for private body parts gives children the words to use and helps them know that it is okay to talk about those body parts.

When teaching your young child the different body parts, consider using the correct words for private body parts along with words such as "tummy" and "ears." You can give older children more information because they are able to understand more. You can also explain that the parts of their bodies covered by a swimsuit are their private body parts.

Step Two

Teach children that "they are the boss of their body." Let your children know that they are in control of who touches their bodies and how. Model this for children: "I don't want you to jump up and down on me. Please stop." Likewise, immediately respect their wishes not to be touched in certain ways. "Looks like you don't want me to pick you up right now. Okay." As you supervise your children's interactions, make it clear that they need to stop tickling or roughhousing if a sibling says "Stop!"

In addition, do not insist that your children give or receive hugs or kisses from relatives and friends if they do not wish to. This teaches children that it's okay to say no to touches from people in their family and others they know. Some relatives might expect a hug from your children every time they see them. Tell

relatives that you are teaching your children to be bosses of their bodies as part of teaching them safety about touching, so they are not offended by your children's behavior.

Step Three

Explain to your child that there are three kinds of touches. The three kinds of touches are:

SAFE TOUCHES

These are touches that keep children safe and are good for them, and that make children feel cared for and important. Safe touches can include hugging, pats on the back, and an arm around the shoulder. Safe touches can also include touches that might hurt, such as removing a splinter. Explain to children that when you remove a splinter, you are doing so to keep them healthy, which makes it a safe touch.

UNSAFE TOUCHES

These are touches that hurt children's bodies or feelings (for example, hitting, pushing, pinching, and kicking). Teach children that these kinds of touches are not okay.

UNWANTED TOUCHES

These are touches that might be safe but that a child doesn't want from that person or at that moment. It is okay for a child to say "no" to an unwanted touch, even if it is from a familiar person. Help your children practice saying "no" in a strong, yet polite voice. This will help children learn to set personal boundaries.

Touching Safety Rules

Once children can name their private body parts and know about different kinds of touches, you can teach them that there is another kind of unsafe touch that is also not okay. This kind of touch is when someone older or bigger touches their private body parts. How you explain this will depend on the age of your child.

For a young child you might say, "Another kind of unsafe touch is when a bigger person touches you on your private body parts and it is not to keep you clean or healthy. So we have a family safety rule that it is never okay for a bigger person to touch your private body parts except to keep you clean and healthy."

Parents should understand that the "clean" part of this rule applies to young children at an age when an adult might help them with diaper changing, going to the toilet, or bathing. The "healthy" part of this rule refers to doctor visits; for example, when the doctor gives a child a shot. An adult family member should always be present at doctor appointments. At some point during the teenage years it will become appropriate for your children to handle their own doctor appointments.

For an older child you might say, "Another kind of unsafe touch is when someone touches you in a "wrong way" on your private body parts and it is not to keep you healthy. So a good family safety rule about touching is that no one should touch your private body parts except to keep you healthy."